

News Release



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California State Parks Ranger Receives Medal of Valor from Governor

California State Park Ranger Jeffrey Scott Sipes of Santa Cruz was recently awarded the Governor's State Employee Medal of Valor for his exemplary service and acts of heroism.

On Sunday June 28, 2009, Jeffrey Scott Sipes was instrumental in saving the life of a 17-year-old teenage boy when he was being electrocuted near Rio Del Mar Beach in Santa Cruz county.

An Aptos high school student was with a group of friends just before 10 pm, when a branch about 70 feet up a eucalyptus tree fell onto a high-voltage power line, knocking conductors and other equipment on to the grassy knoll near Rio Del Mar Beach. The young people were spending recreation time at the beach when they heard a loud noise, saw sparks and thought it was fireworks; but one of the teenagers spotted fire and went up the hillside to attempt to put out the flames.



Photograph by Brian Baer, California State Parks

Witnesses saw a flash of light, and then the neighborhood lights went out. The 17-year-old victim was on the ground, screaming in pain, but his friends could not get him away from the wire, which was still charged with 12,000 volts of power.

Someone called 911. When Ranger Sipes, who is a part-time firefighter, arrived on the scene, and helped Aptos firefighter Captain Greg Hansen pull the boy out of the electrically charged area. Each rescuer grabbed one of the boy's arms and pulled him to safety. Ranger Sipes placed himself in grave physical danger when he helped rescue this victim, knowing that policy calls for rescuers to "isolate and deny entry" until the wires can be turned off.

The victim was subsequently listed in critical condition, suffering major burns to his head, upper back, one arm, legs, hands and feet. Jacob would not have survived if they waited for PG&E to shut down the wires. PG&E later reported that 134 customers lost power during this incident - testifying to the enormity of the situation.

For more information see the Department of Personnel Administration's special website dedicated to the awards at <http://www.medalofvalor.ca.gov/>

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